Medieval Meals

Iron Shepherds Living History

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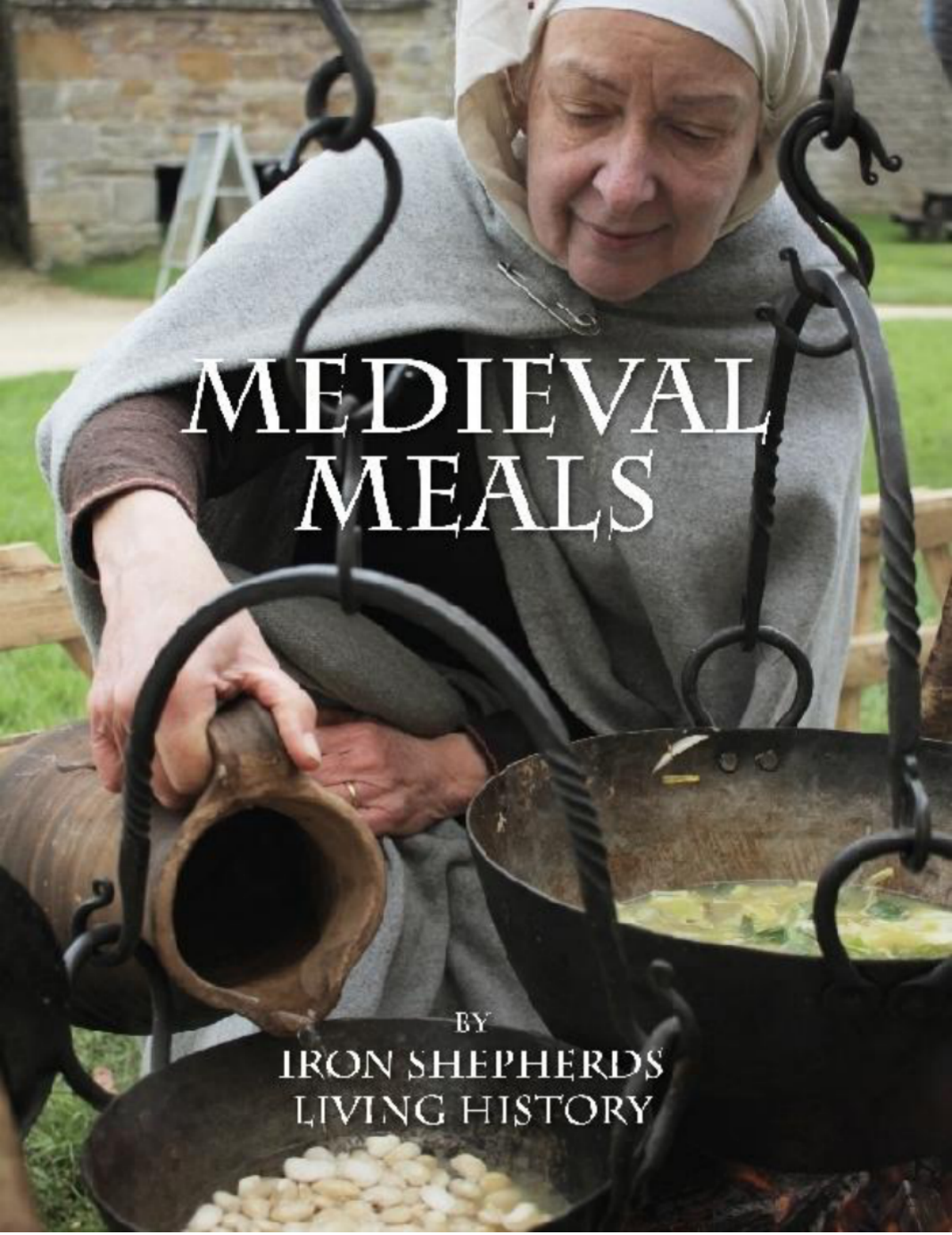
MEDIEVAL
MEALS
BY
IRON SHEPHERDS
LIVING HISTORY

Medieval Meals

Cook & Eat in the 12th Century

Foreword

As a group Iron Shepherds are dedicated to showcasing the past with educational, entertaining and memorable living history experiences.

For almost 7 years we have been spending our precious free time creating and attending events, hosting talks, developing our website and producing a myriad of informative blog posts.

Over the years myself and Susan (Matilda) have often discussed the idea of a producing a Medieval Cookbook. We made a selection of recipe cards but always wanted to take it further.

This has led us here, to this book.

Susan has worked to research recipes and write much of the content for this fabulous book and I, for one, am so pleased to see it become a reality.

We hope you enjoy the book and if you want to get in touch with any comments please do visit our website - **ironshepherdslivinghistory.co.uk**

Stuart Appley
Chairman, Iron Shepherds Living History

Introduction

Hello!

We, the Iron Shepherds, live in the 12th century in a small part of England known as Furness. Sitting in the district of Lancashire (now Cumbria), Furness is a remote area but is the place we call home.

We are always eating, we need to keep well fed to keep strong and tend the fields we rent from the abbey. We enjoy cooking our medieval meals and would love to share them with you.

Sadly it will be almost another two hundred years before the first English cookbook, The Forme of Cury, will be published in the reign of Richard II. So we've decided to write our own.

We hope you like trying our recipes and dining 12th century style.

Foods Available

Everyday food in the 12th century was simple but tasty and nutritious, almost all grown and produced locally.

Vegetables. Mainly beans, onions, leeks, garlic, cabbage, carrots, peas, celery, turnips, radishes and asparagus. Wild plants such as Goosegrass, Fat hen, Sea kale, Sea beet, Marsh samphire, Watercress, Dandelion, Nettles, Wild garlic, Cow parsley, Wild fennel.

Grains. Barley, oats, rye, and a little wheat.

Fish. Herring, mackerel, hake, haddock, pike, bream, eels, salmon, trout, carp, tench, shellfish – mussels, cockles, whelks, oysters.

Meat. Cows, sheep, pigs and goats. Deer and wild boar hunting were the preserve of lordly folk, but pigeons, ducks, geese and other wild animals and game birds were there for people to catch if they could.

Hares and rabbits became more common during the middle ages.

Dairy produce. Milk, cheese and butter were all popular.

Herbs. Native herbs such as borage, cress, watercress, tansy, coriander, dill, mint, mustard and wood sorrel. Introduced herbs such as rosemary, thyme, bay and basil.

Fruit and nuts. Crab apples, pears, plums (including damsons, though origins are debatable), quinces, medlars, grapes, wild strawberries, blackberries, hazelnuts, etc. Fruit could be fresh, preserved or made into vinegar.

Chickens were kept mostly for eggs.

Drinks. Weak ale, herb teas.

Spices. For the rich or those who lived near a port.

Salt.

Honey.

What Foods There Weren't (and why)

The Normans brought a larger range of food and some exciting-if expensive - new flavours. They even brought new names from the French, eg, cooked cow meat became beef (beouf) and sheep meat became mutton (mouton). Returning crusaders brought new fruits and spices from the Middle East.

The following were introduced in the 1100s and 1200s.

Oranges and **lemons, pomegranates, sweet wines** and **spices** were brought to Europe by returning crusaders in the 12th century.

Sugar from sugar cane was introduced by Arab traders in the 13th century but uncommon until the 16th century.

Raspberries. Edward I encouraged the cultivation of raspberries throughout England in the 13th century.

Later introductions include:

Bananas and **rice** were introduced from Asia probably via Africa in Tudor times.

Rhubarb is a late medieval introduction from China.

Blackcurrants were cultivated in Russia by the 11th century, but introduced into Europe in the 17th century.

Potatoes, runner beans, courgettes, avocado, chilli pepper, chocolate, corn (maize), **tomatoes, papaya, peanuts, pineapple** and **vanilla** all came from America.

Orange carrots first appeared in the Netherlands in the 17th Century.

Swedes, a hybrid of cabbage and turnip, were introduced in the 17th century from Scandinavia/Russia.

Tea was introduced in the 16th century from China.

Coffee was introduced in the 17th century from Arabia.

Garden strawberries were bred in the late 18th century. Wild strawberries were though popular before then.

Growing

During the 12th century, and throughout the medieval period, peasants were growing their own food.

On a daily basis they would work tenanted fields to produce crops for their community and for the lord of the Manor, which in Furness, where we're from, was usually the Abbey of St Mary. They would also graze livestock, reared for its meat.

Alongside this, most common villagers would have their own small garden plot, usually beside their house. Here they would grow fruit and veg throughout the year.

Preparing

A peasant household might have a quernstone to grind barley, rye or oat flour. ‘The daily grind’ to make enough flour was a chore for even the youngest. In monasteries, bread-making might be a group activity, each monk having a bread trough and dough, kneading while the monks recited psalms.

Country households would make their own cheese. And even in towns it was common to keep a pig to kill and cure with salt for bacon. Ale brewers were invariably women.

Then as now, food preparation involved a lot of chopping. Medieval recipes were simple and direct. ‘Gobbe it small’ was an instruction for dicing meat.

Cooking

Cooking was done over a log fire, on spits or in a suspended cauldron or pot to the side of the fire. Heated stones (pot boilers) could be used instead of direct heat from the fire beneath. Baking could be done on a stone in the fire covered by a clay pot, or in a clay wood-fired oven. In towns developed the home-delivery of cooked food – many homes had no kitchen and used ‘take-aways’ for items such as roast small birds and pies.

Salting, drying, smoking and storage in fat/oil were the main methods of preserving food. The best way to preserve meat and fish was to keep it alive until needed.

Serving

For common people, food and drink was served mainly in wooden bowls or just a trencher (a hollowed out thick slice of stale bread). People ate with their own wooden or bone spoon The medieval table had little cutlery except for a knife. There were no forks.

Despite the lack of cutlery, etiquette was strict.

" *Never eat bread with abandon till they have set down the dishes; People may think you are famished, else they may judge you a glutton. Tidy the nails of your fingers – dirt to your friends is offensive. Eat what is served as your portion, send what is left to the needy. Relish such talk as is peaceful; try not to chatter when speaking, Nor let your laughter be raucous…* "

'O boy standing at the table'
attributed to Bishop Grosseteste,
1253. (see Rowley p40)

Typical Meals

The peasant day started off with bread and ale, a main meal of bread and pottage and another meal of bread and cheese or perhaps an onion. In monasteries, the Rule of Benedict prescribed a pound of bread and a pound of beans as a daily ration for each monk. The church ruled over eating and drinking throughout the land. Meat was allowed to be eaten only four days a week, with fish served on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays and replacing meat during Lent, when eggs and milk were banned too.

Fish didn't count as 'meat'. Beavers were eaten because of the superficial resemblance of the tail to fish. Beavers became extinct from England in the middle ages because of this reasoning.

Medieval Recipes

What follows are 10 medieval recipes adapted for 21st century cooks. Instead of the fires, cooking pots and smoke in the eyes you can instead use your hob, oven and modern pans to create these delectable medieval recipes.

Pottage

Pottage is a thick soup or stew made of any ingredients easily available and cooked, as its name suggests, ‘in the pot’. Pottage is the staple meal of the Iron Shepherds as it was throughout all the centuries of history in which humans cooked in pots over a fire. Pottage can be left simmering for days, some being eaten and more ingredients added so it is constantly changing.

Experiment with any combination of ingredients to hand, such as onions, leeks, garlic, carrots, mushrooms, herbs, fresh or dried beans and peas, bacon, ham, bones, oats, breadcrumbs, stock and seasoning.

If you use dried beans, first make sure to soak them according to any instructions. Chop everything up, put all the ingredients in a large pan, bring to the boil and simmer slowly, checking and stirring occasionally, and adding more liquid if need be, until all the ingredients are soft and cooked – about an hour. Adjust seasoning and serve with bread and cheese.

Monastic Beans

Dried beans (preferably fava)
A mix of vegetables (anything that is in season)
Pig fat (lard)
Water

Soak the dried beans in water overnight until plump and full of moisture. Once soaked boil the beans in water for one hour, until soft.

Meanwhile roughly chop the mix of vegetables then cook them in the pig fat until soft. Once soft remove from the heat and allow to cool.

Find an old piece of cloth large enough to put the vegetables in.

Place the vegetables in the cloth and wrap the sides up around the veg. Take a good grip of the top of the cloth, hold it over a bowl and squeeze all the juices from the vegetables into the bowl. Once you have got all the juices out discard the mushed up veg.

Once the beans have cooked drain them and place into a serving bowl. Take the vegetable juice and pour it over the beans.

There you have it, one dinner of beans fit for a monk!

Monks in Medieval monasteries would have had a mostly vegetarian diet, never eating meat.

This is just one recipe which they used to enjoy, if enjoy is quite the right word.

Barley Bread

Enough for 2 600g loaves. These are just over a pound in weight, a pound loaf being the daily allowance for a monk or nun.

This recipe is based on various manuscripts about early English breadmaking.

500g strong wholemeal flour
225g barley flour
½ tsp salt
15g fresh yeast (or two sachets of quick yeast)
60ml brown ale
About 425ml warm water
2 tsp clear honey

Mix the dry ingredients in a warmed deep bowl or trough.

Blend the yeast with a little ale then mix with 350ml water and the honey. Stir the liquid into the dry ingredients and mix to a firm dough, adding more flour or water if necessary. Knead until the dough feels elastic then shape it into a ball.

Remove it from the bowl, lightly oil the inside of the bowl and replace the dough. Cover the bowl and leave it in a warm place until the dough is puffy and has almost doubled in size.

Punch it down to remove the air then shape it into two equal loaves.

To be traditional, place your loaves on a baking tray. Or use bread tins if you prefer. Decorate the tops with a few cuts or a cross made with a sharp knife.

Cover each loaf with an upturned bowl and leave in a warm place until well risen.

Bake for 30-40 minutes; they should sound hollow when tapped underneath. If they need longer, lower the heat slightly. Place on a cooling rack and leave until almost cold before cutting the first slice.

Only important people were allowed fine white bread, which was milled and baked separately. Ordinary people had brown bread made with barley, rye, oats and just a little wheat if available. They ground their own coarse flour using a quernstone, mixed it in a wooden bread trough and baked the bread in a clay oven.

Bere Bannocks

Bere is an ancient form of barley brought to Britain by Vikings or even earlier and suited to northern growing conditions. Bannocks are scone-like, baked on a hot stone. This recipe for bere bannocks comes from Barony Mill, Orkney, the only watermill in the UK still producing bere meal (flour).

2 cups of beremeal (or barley flour)
Cup of plain flour
Rounded tsp baking soda
Rounded tsp cream of tartar
25g butter
Pinch of salt
Tbsp plain yogurt or buttermilk
About ½ cup milk or water

Rub in the butter into the dry ingredients, add milk, water or buttermilk to make a stiff but soft dough, roll out or pat on a floured (mixture of flour and beremeal) board to form bannocks. This mixture will make two or three bannocks. With a knife, make guide marks for 6 or 8 portions, then cook on a hot, ungreased girdle (a frying pan will do) for 5 minutes or so each side, turning once or twice, until both sides are browned and the middle is cooked.

Best served warm. Delicious topped with a sliver of cheese, or butter and honey or thick cream and strawberry sauce.

Frumenty

Frumenty is a grain-based pottage that can be savoury or sweet. Plain frumenty made with barley cooked in milk and honey was eaten as a basic porridge. Made with wheat cooked in broth it was a side-dish to accompany meat or fish. This savoury recipe uses cracked (bulgar) wheat. Serves 6.

275g kibbled or cracked (bulgar) wheat

Litre water

150ml meat or chicken stock or milk

Salt to taste

Egg yolks, beaten

Pinch of dried saffron strands

Boil the what in the water for 15 minutes or until it softens.

Remove from the heat and leave to stand for 15 minutes until almost all the water is absorbed. Add the stock. Bring to the boil, add salt to taste and stir over low heat for a few minutes more and serve with meat, game or chicken.

For a richer dish, stir in egg yolks and a pinch of saffron. Stir over a low heat until it thickens then stand off the heat for 5 minutes more when it will thicken more.

For a rich sweet frumenty, cook the grains in milk, thicken with egg yolk and flavour with honey and spices such as nutmeg.

Pulmentum

At Rushen Abbey on the Isle of Man, the monks ate pulmentum, a cooked dish of fish, flour, cereals and milk which looked like porridge. Rushen Abbey was built on land owned by Furness Abbey and there were close links between them so pulmentum was probably on the menu at Furness Abbey too.

We think that pulmentum doesn’t sound appetising and we haven’t tried it.

Rabbit or Hare with Leeks, Barley & Herbs

Chicken works just as well in this tasty one-pot stew which makes the most of locally grown ingredients. Plenty for 6.

- 50g butter
- 2 rabbits or hares or a chicken, cut into joints
- 500g leeks, washed, trimmed and thickly sliced
- 4 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 175g pot barley
- 900ml water
- 3 tbsp red or white wine vinegar
- 2 bay leaves
- 15 sage leaves, roughly chopped
- Salt and pepper

Melt the butter in a heavy pan and fry the meat with the leeks and garlic till the vegetables are slightly softened and the meat lightly browned.

Add the barley, water, vinegar, bay leaves and seasoning. Bring the pot to the boil, cover it and simmer gently for 1-1½ hours or till the meat is really tender and ready to fall from the bone.

Add the sage and continue to cook for several minutes. Adjust the seasoning to taste and serve in bowls.

Roast Onions with Thyme

Onions

Thyme – a handful of fresh or dried equivalent

Vinegar – balsamic or white wine vinegar

Butter

Salt and pepper

Cut large whole onions lengthways in two, trim the ends. The skins will help the onions not to stick during cooking. Or remove the skins of slightly smaller onions and cut a cross in each.

Arrange the onions in a single layer in a well-greased oven-proof dish.

Season with salt and pepper, dot each onion with butter, sprinkle with sprigs of thyme and a few drops of vinegar.

Cover and roast in the oven at about 180 degrees for 40 minutes.

During cooking check and add a little water to prevent sticking.

Tardpolene

Custards are popular and this recipe uses some of the latest imported and exotic fruits and spices in tarts. There were probably as many different ways of making pastry in medieval times as there are now, so use your favourite or even readymade for this luxurious sweet treat. Quantities approximate.

Pastry for 12 tart shells

2-3 pears, peeled, cored and cut into pieces

¼ cup each chopped pitted dates, blanched slivered almonds and raisins; white wine, sugar

¼ tsp each cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg

100g cream cheese

2 eggs and (optional) 2 egg yolks, a little milk

A grating of lemon zest

A few raspberries or blanched almonds

Roll out the pastry, cut 12 circles to fit the tart cases.

Mix all the ingredients apart from an egg yolk.

Spoon the filling into the tart cases and top with raspberries or nuts.

Bake in an oven at 200 degrees until the custard is set and slightly browned on

top.

Apple and Pear Tart

1 pre-baked 8 inch tart case

4 dried figs

450g peeled and cored dessert apples 100g peeled pear

30g raisins

Pinch of saffron

¼ tsp ground cinnamon

¼ tsp ground ginger

Firstly simmer the figs for 5 minutes, drain and allow to cool before chopping.

Mix all the ingredients together then grind into a smooth paste.

Fill the tart case and bake at 190 degrees for about 40 minutes until the fruit gloop is cooked.

Sauces

Strawberry sauce is a favourite, and can be served with meat or bread or bannocks. Cook strawberries in a pan with some water, white wine vinegar, honey and cumin.

A 12th century manuscript from Durham Priory contains some of the oldest recipes in the western world, including these sauces:

- Mix juice of parsley and sage which has been slaked with vinegar with finely ground pepper and garlic; and eat sausage with this.

- For tiny little fish: juice of coriander and garlic mixed with pepper and garlic.

- For lambs: pepper tempered with vinegar.

- For rams: juice of creeping thyme, coriander, parsley, costmary, sage, savory, southernwood, hyssop, and two bay leaves, with vinegar that has been cooked (literally “distempered”) and well strained. Mix pepper and garlic.

- For cow’s meat: mix juice of savory, with cooked vinegar, with pepper and garlic.

- Again, for the same: mix strained juice of raisins with garlic and pepper.

- To chickens, add strained juice of savory to cooked vinegar.

- Again, for sausage: mix parsley juice and strained vinegar with pepper.

- For hen in winter: heat garlic, pepper and sage with water.

Sources & thanks

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